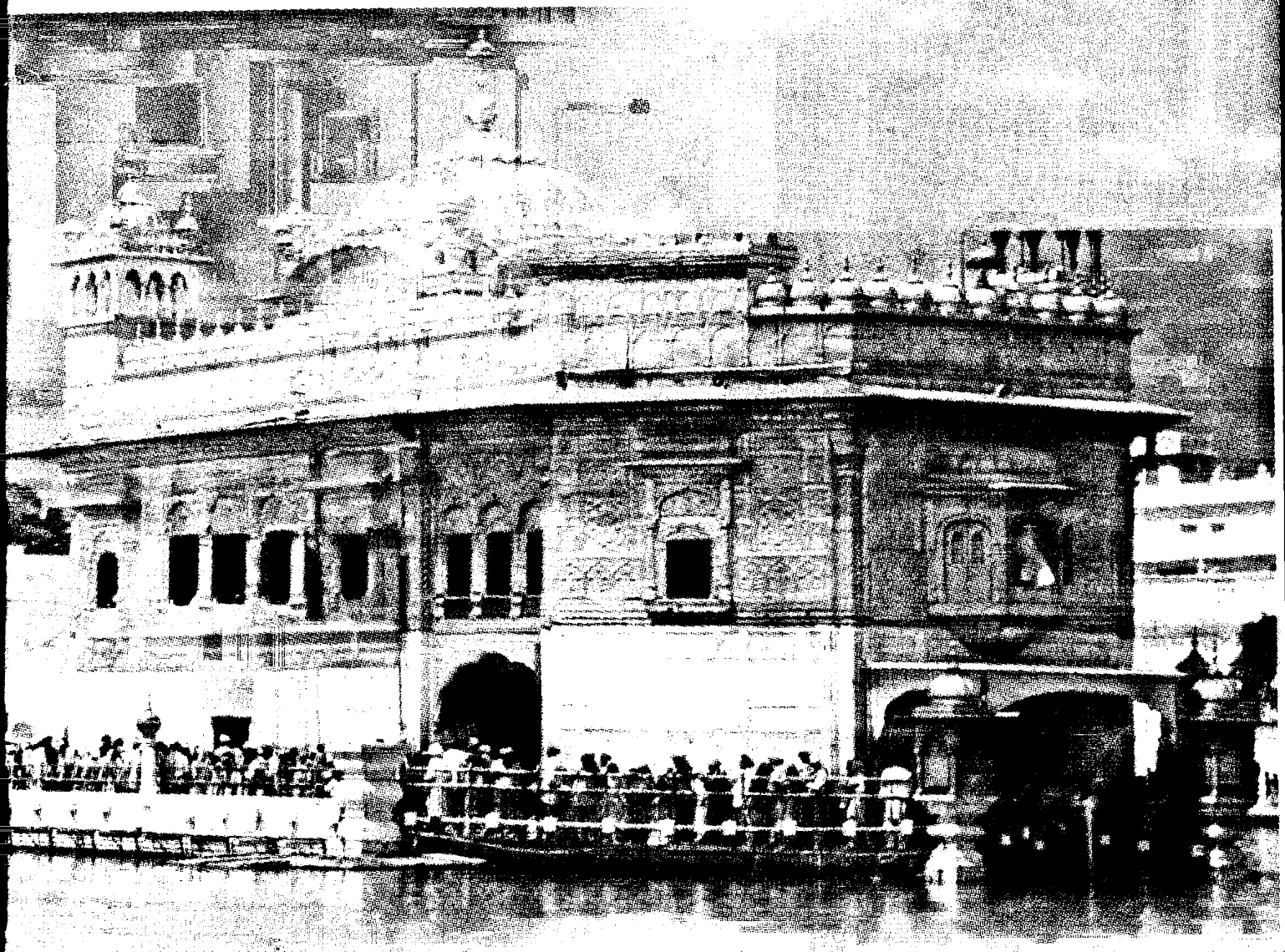
A GLIMPSE OF SIKHISM



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SPIRITUALITY AND ADVANCEMENT

Sikhism is synonymous with Humanism. Sikhism is a Cosmic Faith. A true Sikh certainly believes in the oneness of creation, creator and humanity. Religious rituals and dogmas are meaningless in Sikhism. Each and every person in this world is the abode of Almighty. Therefore, any discrimination based on caste, creed and colour is not justified. Sikhism promotes scientific and material development while taking into account the principles of peace, natural environment, morality and true competition. Guru Granth Sahib (the holy scripture of Sikhs) gives the message of love, respect of human rights, dedication towards duties and accepting God's will,

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which is supreme and all-powerful. God is the source of intellect and beauty.

Guru Gobind Singh Study Circle expresses its utmost pleasure through its Directorate of Languages, Literature and Cultural Affairs on the publication this booklet with the efforts of S.Sohan Singh ji of U.S.A. Any kind of suggestion is welcomed for further improvements.

Joginder Singh
General Secretary
Gurbani Research and
Communication Centre

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IN THE SERVICE OF HUMANITY

Khalsa way of life (Sikh Religion) is much more a practical way of life than a religion. Guru Nanak Dev, the founder of Sikh religion born in Nankana Sahib (now in Pakistan) in 1469 A.D. He preached for oneness. GOD IS ONE who is "TRUTH (Ultimate and Primal TRUTH) ; The Creator of the entire universe, Fearless, without hate and enmity, Immortal, who is free from the cycle of life and death; He is self-existent"

Editorial lines from The Sikh Review (Jan.2000) give the more clear expression regarding 'Sikhism in A Global Perspective.'

"The Sikh diaspora is intrinsic to the Sikh history and heritage, mystically illustrated by the parable concerning Guru

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Nanak's travels through Asia in furtherance of his divine mission. One of the abiding mysteries of the medieval India concerns the uneasy relations between the religions that claim to spring from the same God. Guru Nanak befriended Hindus and Muslims alike, with a message of true humanitarianism. Indeed, Guru Nanak accepted religious plurality and multiculturalism as the starting point of his divine mission, emphasizing fatherhood of God and brotherhood of man, while exhorting every individual to earn honest wages, to share with the needy and to meditate on God's effulgent Name. Only good and caring human beings of whatever religion can ensure social and political stability and progress of human civilization."

A very humble and small effort is

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done with the grace of Almighty to present this booklet with the sole aim to apprise the world about basic principles of Sikhism. I extend my thanks to the Directorate of Languages, Literature and Cultural Affairs (Guru Gobind Singh Study Circle, H.O.Ludhiana, Pb. India) for compiling and publishing this material.

This brochure is dedicated to my respected parents.

Suggestions will be welcomed for future improvements in the matter and presentation.

May God shower His blessings on the whole mankind to develop this Earth planet into a better place.

Sohan Singh
Village and P.O.
Sidhwan Kalan
(Dist.Ludhiana)
Now in U.S.A.

April, 2002

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What is Sikhism

The word 'Sikh' means a 'disciple'. A Sikh is a person who believes in One God and teachings of the Ten Gurus, enshrined in the Guru Granth Sahib, the Sikh Holy Book. Additionally, he or she mustbe having faith and trust in AMRIT, the Sikh Baptism.

BRIEF HISTORY

The Sikh religion was founded by Guru Nanak, who was born in 1469 AD in the village Talwandi, now called' Nankana Sahib' near Lahore (Pakistan). Right from his childhood his keen mind would not accept all the groundless rituals, superstitions and dogmas, which passed for religion in those days.

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Guru Nanak and the nine Gurus, who succeeded him, set a wonderful example of living spiritually, while yet taking an active and secular part in the world.

The tenth and the last Guru, Guru Gobind Singh (1666-1708 AD) initiated the Sikh Baptism ceremony in 1699 AD; and thus gave a distinctive identity to the Sikhs. The first Baptised Sikhs were named *Panj Pyare* (Five Beloved Ones), who in turn baptized the Guru on his request-an event hither to unknown in the history, Shortly before passing away the Guru ordained that Guru Granth Sahib, the Sikh Holy Scripture, would be the ultimate spiritual authority for the Sikhs and the temporal authority would vest in the khalsa panth-The Sikh Commonwealth. Guru Granth Sahib, the Sikh Holy scripture was compiled and edited by the fifth Guru, Guru

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Arjan Dev in 1604 AD. This is the only scripture in the world, which has been compiled by the founders of a faith during their own lifetime.

Guru Arjan also built the world famous Gurdwara-Darbar Sahib or Harimandir Sahib (Also known as' GOLDEN TEMPLE) at Amritsar which is nucleus of Sikhism.

During the eighteenth-century the Sikhs were subjected to various supressions and persecutions by the authorities of the time motivated by communal fanaticism. They had to make supreme sacrifices to protect and preserve their faith and separate entity. The Mughal Empire was on the verge of disintegration. The Afghans had started invading the country under Ahmed Shah Abdali. The Sikhs availed of this opportunity to

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establish their own kingdom, which they ultimately achieved under Maharaja Ranjit Singh (1780-1839 AD). The Sikh Empire lasted for half a century and was annexed by the English in 1849 AD.

During the freedom struggle of India a number of Sikhs kissed the hangman's noose, faced all the brutalities and braved the bullets and suffered long term imprisonments in order to liberate the country. Although the Sikhs constitute only 1.8 percent of India's population, yet they have made a name for themselves in almost all walks of life such as armed forces, agriculture, sports, industry, education, medicine and engineering etc. through sheer dint of hard work and with a missionary dedication. Their progressive and enterprising nature has taken them to almost all countries of the World.

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The Sikh religion is strictly monotheistic, believing in One Supreme God, Absolute yet All-pervading, the Eternal, the Creator, the cause of Causes, without enmity, without hate, both immanent in His creation and beyond it. It is not longer the God of one nation, but the GOD OF GRACE. That being so, He creates man not to punish him for his sins, but for the realization of his true purpose in the cosmos and to merge in from where he issued forth.

'O my mind, thou art the embodiment of Light.

know thy Essence'

'O my mind, the Lord is ever with thee; through the Guru's Word enjoy His Love; Knowing thy essence thou knowest thy Lord; and knowest thou the mystery

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of birth and death.

(Guru Granth P-441)

The basic postulate of Sikhism is that life is not sinful in its origin, but having emanated from a pure Source, the True One abides in it. Thus sayeth Nanak.

'O my mind, thou art the spark of the Supreme Light; know thy essence.'

Not only the whole of Sikh Philosophy, but the whole of Sikh history and character, flows from 'this principle'.

The Sikhs do not recognise the caste system nor do they believe in idol-worship, rituals, or superstitions. The gods and goddesses are considered as non-entities.

This religion consists of practical living, in rendering service to humanity and engendering tolerance and brotherly love towards all. The SIKH Gurus did not advocate retirement from the world in

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order to attain salvation. It can be achieved by any one who earns an honest living and leads a normal life.

'He alone, O Nanak, knoweth the Way, who earneth with the sweat of his brow, and then shareth it with the other.'

(Guru Granth P-1245)

Nanak gave new hope to the downtrodden mankind to join his fraternity as equals. He is creator of the NEW MAN in the New World supported by a new morality.

Riches and personal possessions are not hindrance in living by spiritual ideals. Sikhism does not believe in the maxim "It is easier for a camel to go through the eyes of a needle than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God." On the other hand the Sikh Dictum is as under.

They, who are attuned to the Lord,

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by the Guru's Grace, Attain to the Lord in the midst of Maya (i.e. Wealth).

(Guru Granth P-921)

Sikhism does not accept the ideology of pessimism. It advocates optimism and hope. The maxim, "resist not evil but whosoever shall smite thee on the right cheek turn to him the other also", does not find any place in Sikh way of life. On the other hand it enjoins its followers.

"When an affair is past every other remedy, it is righteous indeed, to unsheath the sword." (Guru Gobind Singh)

DISTINCTIVE PERSONALITY

A Sikh has a distinctive personality. This distinction is represented by five symbols, popularly known as five K's because the first letter of each symbol begins with the letter 'K'. These are Kesha

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(long and unshorn hair), Kangha (a comb), Kara (a steel bracelet), Kachha (a pair of shorts) and Kirpan (a sword). Sikh men tie beautiful turban on unshorn head.

People who wear a uniform and who are imbued with disciplined outlook are better able to achieve unity of purpose and acquire a real sense of brotherhood than those who have set no particular standards. Sikh without symbol of keshas is a nonentity. Those who cut their hair or trim their beard commit a breach of the Cardinal Rules of the Order, and are considered as 'apostates'.

SIKH BAPTISM

Amrit (The Sikh Baptism) is a must for every Sikh. No minimum or maximum age is stipulated for getting baptised. A Sikh undertakes to uphold the principles

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of its faith and Code of Conduct as prescribed by the Gurus.

Any man or woman of any nationality, race or social standing, who adheres to the principles of the Faith, has a right to receive baptism and join the Sikh Commonwealth-The Khalsa Panth.

Sikh Code of Conduct

The Sikh code of conduct is known as "Sikh Rehat Maryada". (It is based upon the teachings of Guru Granth Sahib), the Sikh traditions and conventions. These rules are meant for carrying out the religious ceremonies and enforcing the discipline of the Faith in an uniform manner throughout the world. No individual or organisation howsoever important it may be, has a right either to amend these rules

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or to frame new ones. This power rests with the Panth i.e. the community as a whole acting through their Beloved Five (Panj Payare). Any rule, which over-rides the basic teachings of the Faith, is ultra vires.

All intoxications such as alcohol, tobacco and all its derivation, Trimming of the Keshas, Eating the meat (Kutha) prepared as per Muslim rites are forbidden (Hallal). Adultery is considered as a sin. A Sikh should regard another man's wife as his sister or mother and another man's daughter as his own daughter. The same rule is applicable to the Sikh woman also.

WOMAN IN THE SIKH SOCIETY.

Woman is regarded as a significant part of the Sikh community. She receives the utmost reverence for her role in the

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family and society. The birth of a daughter is not considered inauspicious nor does there exist any custom like 'Sati'-the burning of the widow with her husband's dead body on the funeral pyre. Rather a widow has a right to remarry if she so desires.

A woman is considered to have the same soul as man and she has an equal right to grow spiritually and to attend religious congregations and recite divine hymns in the Sikh Temple. She is also eligible to participate and perform all ceremonies including Baptism.

Sikh women do not put on Veil (Purdah). Dowry and divorce are not permitted. Wearing of clothes, which expose the body and breed lustful thoughts are considered dishonourable.

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CEREMONIES OF THE SIKHS

The important ceremonies among the Sikhs are those associated with Birth, naming the child, Amrit (Baptism), Anand Karaj (marriage) and the Death ceremony. The most important among all these is the Amrit (Sikh Baptism) Ceremony.

No special rituals are attached to these ceremonies. The only important aspect is recitation of Shabad (hymns) from Guru Granth Sahib.

The dead amongst the Sikhs are cremated and their ashes are thrown into nearest canal or river. No sanctity is attributed to any particular river. It is forbidden to erect monuments over the remains of the dead.

All these ceremonies have a common objective, namely to remind us of one's relation with God. These are conceived as

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means to a holy end i.e. the union of soul with the Lord.

Marriage in Sikhism:

Marital bond according to Sikh religion is a sacrament-holy union and not a contract.

"They are not wife and husband who only sit together Rather are they wife and husband who have one spirit in them. (Guru Granth, P.788)

Sikhism does not believe in celibacy. Married and family life is considered honourable, natural and ideal.

'O my mind, keep thyself detached even in the household, if thou practisest the Truth, and holdest thy desire and doest good Deeds, thy mind is illumined by the Guru's Grace. (Guru Granth, P.26)

The marriage of Sikh couple is solemnized by circumambulating four

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times around the Guru Granth Sahib. Each time a Shabad-Epithalamium, which is a part of the marriage service is recited by a Sikh Priest who performs the marriage ceremony. The priest tells them to mould their conjugal relations as per the model laid down in these Four Shabadas (Hymns).

The same ceremony is performed at the remarriage of a widow or a widower.

FAIRS AND FESTIVALS

The Sikhs celebrate the following days:

The advent birth and death anniversaries of the Ten Gurus. The installation day of the Holy Granth as the Spiritual Guide (Guru of the Sikhs).

The birth of the Khalsa i.e Baisakhi Day that generally falls on the 13th April

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each year.

Martyrdom days of the prominent Sikhs who died for the sake of their religion or in defence of the oppressed.

The days connected with the important events of the Sikh history.

The Daily Life of a Sikh

Every Sikh is expected to get up in the morning before dawn. After taking bath he should meditate on the Name of God.

Rise thou early and meditate on the Name

Yea, dwell on the Lord night and day.
Then, though sufferest not sorrow
And all thy woes depart.

(Guru Granth, P.255)

The following five compositions are recited every day

Morning: Japji Sahib, Jaap Sahib and

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Ten Swiyyas. Evening : Rehras

Night: (Before going to bed) Sohila.

A Sikh is required to attend Gurdwara-the Sikh Temple-as a part of daily routine.

SANGAT AND PANGAT

The two important features of a Gurdwara are Sangat -congregations and Pangat-Community Kitchen also known as Guru-Ka-Langer. This community kitchen is meant for providing food to all devotees, pilgrims and visitors. It is a symbol of equality, fraternity and brotherhood. It is here that the high and the low, the rich and the poor the learned and the ignorant, the kings and pauper,s all share the same food sitting together in one row. This kitchen is run by the common contributions of the sikhs. This institution of Langar (Common

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kitchen) is instrumental in creating social equality among the whole mankind.

THE GURDWARA

The Sikh temple is called Gurdwara. In every Gurdwara the Sikh Holy scripture is installed in the main hall, which is used for prayer and daily service.

Every person irrespective of caste, creed, culture or nationality can visit it. Before entering the Gurdwara one must take off his shoes and cover his head. On entering the main hall every one approaches the Holy Book (Guru Granth Sahib) and bows before it in reverence and takes his place.

Any Sikh male or female may conduct the prayer or perform the services.

Services begin with singing of hymns with the musical instruments. On special

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occasions, singing is intercepted with lectures, poems, or other compositions highlighting events from Sikh history. The services are concluded with Ardas-the prayer, which invokes God's blessing in granting peace, prosperity and protection to all mankind.

After the prayers a Shabad-hymn, is read from the Holy Scripture and then *'Karah Parshad'*, a sweet semoliner-pudding made from flour, sugar and butter is distributed to the congregation.

On each Gurdwara, **Nishan Sahib,** a flag of yellow colour surmounted with a Khanda-(double edged sword) is erected. This symbolises the combination of temporal and spiritual aspect of Sikh life. Each city or town has Gurdwaras according to their requirements. All of them have the same sanctity. There are

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some Gurdwara which in addition to being a place of prayer have also historic importance. The five most important Gurdwaras are known as TAKHAT/ thrones or seats of authority. These are Takhat Patna Sahib in Bihar, Takhat Kesgarh Sahib at Anandpur Sahib, Takhat Damdama Sahib at Talwandi-Sabo in Punjab, Takhat Hazur Sahib at Nanded in Maharashtra and Akal Takhat Sahib at Amritsar, which is also the supreme; temporal injunctions are issued from here from time to time for the guidance of the community. These injunctions are known as Hukam Namas and have the binding force of Sikh Personal Law.

There is no such class as priesthood in Sikhism. However, the one who performs the daily service is called the Granthi. The hymn-singers are called Ragis

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and the singing of hymns is called Kirtan i.e. praise of the Lord.

We conclude this brochure with the following words from our daily prayer.

' O God, give us light, give us understanding, so that we may know what pleaseth Thee. And may all (the whole mankind), prosper by thy Grace'.

Sikhism is a practical religion-a faith of hope and optimism. Its ideals form a large part of the more progressive elements in humanity today, it shows mankind how to lead a worthy and useful life in the world, which elevates it to the status of Universal World Faith.

Sikh Salutation

Waheguruji Ka Khalsa, Waheguru ji Ki Fateh. (Hail God's Khalsa, Victory be to God)

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Code of Sikh conduct and conventions*

Living in Consonance with Guru's Tenets

A Sikh's living, earning livelihood, thinking and conduct should accord with the Guru's tenets. The Guru's tenets are :

(a) Worship should be rendered only to the One Timeless Being and to no god or goddess.

(b) Regarding the ten Gurus, the Guru Granth and the ten Gurus' word alone as saviours and holy objects of veneration.

(c) Regarding ten Gurus as the effulgence of one light and one single entity.

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* An Extract from the booklet published by S.G.P.C. Amritsar Pb. India.

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(d) Not believing in caste or descent, untouchability, magic, spells, incantation, omens, auspicious times, days and occasions, influence of stars, horoscopic dispositions, shradh (ritual serving of food to priests for the salvation of ancestors on appointed days as per the lunar calendar), ancestor worship, khiah (ritual serving of food to priests-Brahmins-On the lunar anniversaries of the death of an ancestor), pind (offering of funeral barley cakes to the deceased's relatives), patal (ritual donating of food in the belief that that would satisfy the hunger of a departed soul), diva (the ceremony of keeping an oil lamp lit for 360 days after the death, in the belief that that lights the path of the deceased), ritual funeral acts, hom (lighting of ritual fire and puring intermittently clarified butter, food-

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grains etc.into it for propitiating gods for the fulfilment of a purpose), jag (religious ceremony involving presentation of oblations), tarpan (libation), sikha-sut (keeping a tuft of hair on the head and wearing thread), bhadan (shaving of head on the death of a parent), fasting on new or full moon or other days, wearing of frontal marks on the forehead, wearing of thread, wearing of a necklace of the pieces of tulsi stalk, veneration of any graves, of monuments erected to honour the memory of a deceased person or of cremation sites, idolatory and such like superstitious observances.

(e) The Khalsa should maintain its distinctiveness among the professors of different religions of the world, but should not hurt the sentiments of any person professing another religion.

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(f) A Sikh should pray to God before launching off any task.

(g) Learning Gurmukhi (Punjabi in Gurmukhi script) is essential for a Sikh. He should pursue other studies also.

(h) It is a Sikh's duty to get his children educated in Sikhism.

(i) A Sikh should, in no way, harbour any antipathy to the hair of the head with which his child is born. He should not tamper with the hair with which the child is born. He should add the suffix "Singh" to the name of his son. A Sikh should keep the hair of his sons and daughters intact.

(j) A Sikh must not take hemp (cannabis), opium, liquor, tobacco, in short, any intoxicant. His only routine intake should be food.

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(k) Piercing of nose or ears tor wearing ornaments is forbidden for Sikh men and women.

(l) A Sikh should not kill his daughter; nor should he maintain any relationship with a killer of daughter.

(m) The true Sikh of the Guru shall make an honest living by lawful work.

(n) A Sikh shall regard a poor person's mouth as the Guru's cash offerings box.

(o) A Sikh shall not steal, form dubious associations or engage in gambling.

(p) He who regards another man's daughter as his own daughter, regards another man's wife as his mother, has coition with his own wife alone, he alone is a truly discipined Sikh of the Guru.

A Sikh woman shall likewise keep

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within the confines of conjugal rectitude.

(q) A Sikh shall observe the Sikh rules of conduct and conventions from his birth right upto the end of his life.

(r) A Sikh, when he meets another Sikh, should greet him with "Waheguru ji ka Khalsa, Waheguru ji ki Fateh". This is ordained for Sikh men and women both.

(s) It is not proper for a Sikh woman to wear veil or keep her face hidden by veil or cover.

(t) For a Sikh, there is no restriction or requirement as to dress except that he must wear Kachhehra and turban. A Sikh woman may or may not tie turban.

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